

R 100605Z JUL 87
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0541
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 03703

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: [PTER](#) [TU](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: SYRIA AND NEWS OF A "NEW AND GRAVE MOVE BY
THE PKK"

REF: STATE 208025

11. SECRET ENTIRE TEXT

12. SUMMARY: REFTTEL IS DEAD RIGHT TO SEEK ALL THE INFORMATION WE CAN GET ON A PKK ATTACK ON U.S. FACILITIES IN TURKEY. IF WE FIND SYRIA IS INVOLVED, WE SHOULD PROTEST HERE STRONGLY -- BARRING TURKISH OBJECTIONS TO SUCH A U.S. MOVE. BUT WE SEE SYRIA AS LARGELY -- IF NOT ENTIRELY -- ABANDONING TERRORISM FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS. END SUMMARY.

13. PKK ATTACKS SUCH AS THE ONE ALLEGED IN THE TURKISH PRESS ACCOUNT MENTIONED IN REFTTEL MUST BE PURSUED BUT WE NO LONGER REFLEXIVELY ASSUME THAT SYRIA PROMOTED OR CONDONED THE ATTACK. THE PKK HAS NOT BEEN TOTALLY UPROOTED HERE LIKE ABU NIDAL, BUT IT HAS BEEN RESTRICTED. IT WON'T BE COMPLETELY UPROOTED, IN OUR VIEW. KURDS FORM ONE OF THE IMPORTANT MINORITIES OF SYRIA AND THE RULING ALAWIS HAVE REACHED OUT TO THEM -- AS TO MINORITY CHRISTIANS, DRUZE AND ISMAILIS -- TO FORM THE COALITION WHICH IS NEEDED TO OFFSET THE GREAT MAJORITY OF SYRIANS, WHO ARE SUNNI ARABS, THE TRADITIONAL RULING CLASS. KURDS ARE THE LEAST PROMINENT PART OF THE COALITION, PARTLY BECAUSE THEY ARE SUNNI, AND ARE IN NO WAY IN A POSITION TO ASSERT A RIGHT TO CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS WHICH COMPLICATES SYRIAN RELATIONS WITH A RESURGENT TURKEY.

14. WE CONTINUE TO DOUBT THAT SYRIA IS ENCOURAGING, RATHER THAN DISCOURAGING, ANY SUCH ATTACKS. SYRIA HAS CLAMPED DOWN ON ASALA -- THE ARMENIAN BISHOP HERE SAYS IT HAS BEEN THROWN OUT -- AND HAS MOVED PKK CAMPS OUT OF THE COUNTRY. THE REASONS ARE MANY: BLOWN OPERATIONS, EUPHRATES WATER, A SKILLFUL TURKISH DIPLOMACY WHICH COMBINES THE CARROT WITH THE STICK. OPERATIONS CONTINUE, BUT IRAQI AND IRANIAN SUPPORT FOR SUCH OPERATIONS -- TO EMBARRASS SYRIA AND EMBROIL IT WITH TURKEY -- REMAIN PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATIONS FOR US. BUT WE MUST FOLLOW UP SUCH GOSSAMER POSSIBILITIES AS REFTTEL - BUT - ALTHOUGH WE HAVE A LEGITIMATE INTEREST IN RAISING KURDISH TERRORISM AGAINST U.S. FACILITIES, THE TURKS WILL NOT RPT NOT WELCOME OUR DOING SO WITH SYRIANS IN THE CASE OF PKK. THE TURKS PROBABLY WILL WANT US NOT TO GET INVOLVED AT ALL, IN FACT -- EVEN IF IT IS PROVED THAT THE ALLEGED PKK ATTACKERS CAME FROM SYRIA.

15. UNDERGIRDING THIS NOW IS OUR FEELING THAT A BROAD AND DISPARATE NUMBER OF DEVELOPMENTS -- WITH THE WEST, TURKEY, MODERATE ARABS, IRAQ, IRAN, AND THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY HAVE FORCED A TURN-AROUND HERE ON TERRORISM. EVEN SYRIA'S MUCH PUBLICIZED SUPPORT FOR ITS OWN SUICIDE BOMBERS IN SOUTH LEBANON HAS ALL BUT HALTED IN THE PAST YEAR. ASAD IS WEAK AND WANTS NO PROBLEMS WITH ISRAEL. WE DON'T EXPECT ATTACKS ON ISRAELI TARGETS TO BE DISCARDED ENTIRELY; AFTER ALL, SMALL SCALE, DENIABLE ATTACKS ARE THE WEAPON OF THE WEAK. IN ADDITION, ASAD BELIEVES HE HAS EVERY RIGHT TO SUPPORT "NATIONAL RESISTANCE" INSIDE ISRAELI-OCCUPIED TERRITORY AGAINST CERTAIN TARGETS. (THIS IS A PROBLEM FOR US. THE ISRAELI DEFINITION OF "TERRORISM" ON THE WEST BANK AND SOUTHERN LEBANON APPEARS DIFFERENT FROM OURS -- UNDERSTANDABLY, SINCE WE CHAMPION FOES OF OCCUPATION IN AFGHANISTAN, NICARAGUA, ANGOLA, CAMBODIA, AND ELSEWHERE, WHILE THE ISRAELIS ARE OCCUPIERS WITH NO LARGE STAKE BEYOND THEIR BORDER.) THUS, ASAD MAY TOSS MOST PALESTINIANS OUT OF DAMASCUS, BUT HE WILL HOLD OUT A REMNANT TO FRONT FOR

HIS TOTTERING POLICY OF "ARMED CONFRONTATION" WITH ISRAEL HE SIMILARLY WANTS TO USE HIZBALLAHIS AGAINST ISRAEL'S OCCUPATION AND WON'T HESITATE, WE THINK, TO TAKE ON CERTAIN LEBANESE GROUPS WHICH PUSH HIM TOO FAR; THE LEBANESE ARE WEAKER THAN SYRIA, AND USE TERRORISM EVERY DAY THEMSELVES. WITNESS KARAMI, AND MANY OTHERS OF EVERY CONFESSION. ANYWAY, SYRIA ISN'T OUT OF THE TERRORISM BUSINESS.

16. ONLY TIME WILL TELL WHETHER ASAD HAS REDUCED TERRORISM AS MUCH AS WE THINK. "YOU WON'T BELIEVE ME," SHRUGGED ASAD, AFTER TELLING ONE AMERICAN VISITOR THAT THERE WOULD BE NO TERRORIST OPERATION RUN OUT OF SYRIA IN THE FUTURE, "BUT IT IS USEFUL TO SAY SO, TO CLOSE THE DOSSIER." WE MUST BE ALERT TO EVERY INCIDENT--BUT NOT IGNORE THE SIGNS OF A BASIC CHANGE.

RANSOM